



A clear signal

Even as India and China engage in talks, the current state of tension is likely to continue

China passing a new border law amid a continuing stalemate in negotiations with India sends a clear signal to New Delhi that Beijing is in no mood to quickly end the 18-month-long crisis along the LAC. The law, which will take effect on January 1, designates the responsibilities of various agencies in China, from the military to local authorities, in guarding the frontiers. It stipulates that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China are sacred and inviolable. Calling on the military to "guard against and combat any act that undermines territorial sovereignty and land boundaries", the law says the Chinese military "shall carry out border duties" to "resolutely prevent, stop and combat invasion, encroachment, provocation and other acts". India has reacted sharply, telling China that it must not use legislation as a "pretext" to formalise the PLA's actions since last year to unilaterally alter the LAC. While the law says Beijing will negotiate with its neighbours to settle its borders, India reminded China that the legislation will have little bearing on the India-China boundary as both sides are yet to resolve the boundary question. Responding to India's concerns, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the law would not affect the implementation of existing agreements. The legislation also has implications for the only other country China has unresolved land borders with – Bhutan – calling for continuing efforts to develop border areas. Among those efforts is the on-going construction of frontier villages, including in disputed areas.

The Chinese side may justify the law as an "internal" matter akin to India's abrogation of Article 370 and the creation of a Union Territory in Ladakh, which China strongly opposed because it included Aksai Chin, but there is one crucial difference. The new Chinese legislation, first proposed in March, came almost a year into the LAC crisis. It followed the PLA's amassing of two divisions of troops in forward areas in the summer of 2020, in contravention of the four past border agreements, and essentially gives a stamp of approval to those moves. If both New Delhi and Beijing at least appear to be in agreement that the legislation will not affect past agreements, the fact is those understandings are already in tatters. The last round of LAC talks, held on October 10, ended with both sides trading accusations, Beijing blaming India for making "unrealistic" demands and New Delhi countering that the other side offered no real proposals for a solution. Indeed, the new law underlines that China increasingly sees little space for compromise as far as its frontiers are concerned. Even as India and China continue negotiations, the law is the latest signal that the current state of affairs along the border, marked by continuing deployments by both sides in forward areas and a build-up of infrastructure, is likely to continue over the longer term.

A climate dividend

While a net zero commitment can be avoided, India stands to gain from an energy transition

As it prepares to face pressure at the COP26 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow, India is adopting the stand that a national deadline for net zero carbon dioxide emissions is uncalled for, given its moral claim to a far greater share of the remaining global carbon budget. The budget, which represents the estimated volume of future emissions that will allow global average temperature rise to be kept within safe limits – well below 2°C or 1.5°C under the Paris Agreement – must anyway be shared by all countries. Since China, the U.S. and the EU collective, representing the highest emissions, are expected to occupy a big share of the remaining budget calculated at between 420-580 Gigatonnes of CO₂, India will again rely on its historical energy poverty, underdevelopment and low per capita emissions to convince the world that a net zero target is incongruous with the present reality. Yet, as the Centre must acknowledge, a minimalist approach is not an option, given the global repercussions of emissions for all vulnerable nations, and India's own alarming losses from periodic extreme weather events. It can seek convergence with the world on identifying green growth pathways, aligning future investments with a smart recovery plan for COVID-19, embracing renewable energy more widely and averting long-term lock-in effects of fossil fuel dependence in energy generation, buildings, mobility and so on.

An immediate leap into net zero may yet be avoided, and a core message at Glasgow would be that rich countries are yet to deliver on the promised \$100 billion a year from 2020 to help poor nations adapt to climate change; but India's case can be strengthened only with a clear plan for a multi-sectoral energy transition. There is little evidence, for instance, that the indirect carbon tax in the form of very high levies on automotive fuels has been earmarked for a big green push through affordable electric mobility, or even a financial dividend to all citizens to mitigate inflationary price effects on essential consumption. As national scientific advisers have argued in a joint statement on the eve of the UN climate conference – and to which India's Principal Scientific Adviser is a signatory – it is essential for governments to draw up precise technological, socio-economic, and financial policies and requirements to demonstrate a commitment to the 1.5°C goal. The country must seize the moment and present convincing plans that will be rolled out in the present decade in order to attract climate finance, even while buttressing the argument for a medium-term window to taper down carbon emissions. If severe floods, droughts and more frequent storms erode the assets of citizens, governments of the future will have to pay for lack of foresight today.

The perils of ideological certitude

There seems an order of priorities in place for much of the electorate instead of the bread and butter governance issues



HAMID ANSARI

Trend, fashions or ideas float in all societies. When does a trend become an ideology? What motivates an individual to commit itself to it?

An ideology is understood to mean a system of ideas that aspires to explain the world, and at times change it. Some call it the science of ideas aimed at serving people, ridding them of prejudice, preparing them for the sovereignty of a preferred idea.

Regulating behaviour

This would seem to be obvious ever since humans indulged in deductive and inductive reasoning for sheer survival in daily life. This process matured with time and experience down the ages. When simple explanations were not discernible, the phenomena were attributed to superhuman or divine forces. Each of these sought justice between human beings living together. Hence, the dictum that justice is the first law of human institutions. Evidence of it is available in the ancient codes of China, Mesopotamia, India and elsewhere. Overtime, these became religious codes and were duly sanctified. They all held out visions of an apogee of rectitude that mankind should endeavour to attain.

In all cases the purpose was to

regulate human behaviour in societies. The unstated premise in most was that the average member of a social group living together was too busy or simplistic or both to discern the full meaning or implications and was, for the purposes of these laws almost mindless in the sense of acting without particular reason, ready and willing to observe the dicta and the accompanying suggestion of punishment in case of disobedience. Obedience was sought to become habitual.

Quest for social order

The political atmospherics of the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in Europe, sought to imbibe ideologies with their focus on change with greater meaning to the public. Hence, the assertion in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*: The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.

The 20th century had a surfeit of these, each addressing an intended audience ranging from local and regional to global and premised on an idealised social order. Each also portrayed a demonology premised on social class or ethnic specificity, from whose tyranny salvation was promised. Thus, communism, with its vision of a classless communist society promising to 'each according to his/her need', made sense to the disposed. Similarly, and apart from various versions of anarchism in European worker movements, national socialism in Germany and Italy tantalised its votaries with the focus on the nation and the



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fatherland. All of these found emulators in colonial lands in India, China and in some parts of western Asia. They were all characterised by what Eric Hobsbawm depicted as 'ruthless, brutal and command' versions of socialism.

Freedom, communal ideas

In India, the germination of ideas of 'communal consciousness' (in cases with political overtones) on a societal scale alongside the urge for freedom from foreign rule surfaced in a segment of society in the closing decades of the 19th century. The effort by Mahatma Gandhi and his like-minded supporters was countered by many among Hindus and Muslims who deluded themselves as belonging to separate 'nations'. The rest was done by the Mountbatten Plan in 1947 and the death and destruction that accompanied it.

The past three decades have witnessed the ease with which the Bharatiya Janata Party's political approach and tactics have made headway in the public mind. Electoral data in recent decades indicates the shift in its vote share, diligently and successfully built upon

on exclusive identity in adversarial contrasts to what is dubbed non-Indic, meaning, principally, adherents of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam but politically focused on the latter two. Why and how has this order of priorities been put in place for a good segment of the electorate instead of the bread and butter governance issues? In State elections from 2014 to 2019, its vote share reached or crossed the 50% mark in Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Delhi, etc. Political commentators attribute this and its subsequent spectacular success essentially to successful advocacy of majoritarianism.

Agenda of artificial lines

This despite the dispersal of the minority population in most parts of India and the fact that in daily life, all sections of people, majority and minorities, live in the same or adjacent neighbourhoods, and in daily life work together. Despite it, artificial lines are sought to be drawn for laying the foundations of a majoritarian agenda by categorisation of faiths on the basis of their places of origin. How far back in history can one go when confronted with M.S. Golwalkar's observation that "Iran is nothing but the base of Aryabhumi" and part of "grand picture of our motherland"? So were the Aryans, and their faith and philosophy. Was it Indic or non-Indic?

It considered convenient to recall Swami Vivekanand's letter of June 1898 in which he said, "I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam theories of

Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind", adding that "for our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam – Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope."

Also lost in the stated parameters of Hindutva is the constitutional imperative of fraternity.

Core issues

The Hindutva agenda of viewing matters through the prism of faith has perhaps disrupted or weakened the post-Mandal equations and brought electoral gains; so has the intoxicating impact of the success of the Ram Mandir movement. It, however, cannot explain away the policy and its implementation challenges posed by the on-going protests against the farm laws, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, National Population Register, widespread unemployment and a host of other measures resulting in dire distress in most segments of society.

Does this 'ideological certitude' explain away the public distress and its widespread publicity within the country and in credible foreign media? Can it be attributed to a mindlessness of its supporters who are deluded by an uncritical ideological conviction? Would it reflect, public indoctrination notwithstanding, in the forthcoming State elections, and beyond it? Would the lord of Hindutva neither slumber nor sleep?

Hamid Ansari was the Vice President of India (2007-2017)

Getting the focus back on Early Childhood Education

The home environment and stimulation children receive within the household can be important contributory factors

NISHA VERNEKAR, POOJA PANDEY & KARAN SINGHAL

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is crucial to the overall development of children, with impacts on their learning and even earning capabilities throughout their lifetimes. Despite the importance of ECE, little has been said about the continuance of ECE delivery during the COVID-19 school closures, reminiscent of its *status quo* even prior to the novel coronavirus pandemic. Those attending preschool are primarily enrolled in the nearly 14 lakh anganwadis spread across the country where ECE continues to suffer from low attendance and instructional time amid prioritisation of other early childhood development services in the anganwadi system (<https://bit.ly/3G2F3W>).

Where ECE has continued during COVID-19 pre-school closures, access has reduced and the priority for ECE is low within households. In a recent study by the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy (<https://bit.ly/3DXG88i>), 45% of the 650+ households surveyed in urban Maharashtra reported that they prioritise their older child's education over ECE.

A crucial factor for households to be able to prioritise ECE is active parental engagement in their child's education, especially for children in the age group of three to six years who spend a majority of their time within the household and rely greatly on parental assistance in the learning process. The overall development of a child in the early stages edicts a conducive home environment and parental

involvement in addition to equitable access to the schooling system. As such, the home environment and stimulation children receive within the household can contribute to their overall development. For example, studies have found that the act of making conversation with your child in the early years has significant gains on language skills they develop (<https://bit.ly/3BZn1d6>).

Role of parental engagement

Enabling parental engagement in ECE requires an understanding of barriers that usually prevent parents from meaningfully engaging in their child's education.

The socio-economic background of households determines access to preschools and the ability to invest in ECE. Worryingly, the lack of priority for ECE often means that households choose to forgo investing in ECE altogether. The pandemic has highlighted the glaring digital divide in the country, even in an urban context. Unless the state vows to provide devices and Internet access to all children, it is clear that complete reliance on technology is not an option.

Even for those who are able to overcome the initial barrier of access, the ability to engage in ECE at home remains dependent on time and ability. Households that have limited means have little time to invest in educational activities in the home. In the study mentioned above, with low-income households engaged in ECE in urban Maharashtra during COVID-19, we find that job and income losses led to further de-prioritisation of edu-



RAGHUNATHAN S.R.

cation, and the need to invest in educational and digital resources for its continuance during school closures.

Even among households that are able to create the time for education, many parents lack the self-efficacy to support their child's learning. Most parents lack knowledge of effective methods to facilitate learning within the home, and appropriate means of using technology for education. Parents in low-income households are additionally less likely to be able to access support to learn such methods. COVID-19 school closures made engagement of parents in their child's education a further necessity.

Overcoming barriers

Crossing these barriers will become crucial as we move towards achieving universal and equitable ECE, as envisioned in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Some of these are harder to address, such as internalising the importance of ECE among parents. This shift of mindset requires prolonged and committed state action, which at present does not reflect any such urgency.

Other barriers, however, are easier to address if we operationalise

support of the state, schools and teachers towards the goal of enabling parental engagement at home. The pandemic has created an opportunity where parents and teachers have increasingly recognised the crucial role of parents as partners in their child's education. As we slowly move towards the re-opening of schools for younger grades, we should not lose sight of this.

In the same study we conducted in urban Maharashtra, we studied two ECE programmes – the E-paatshala programme in Balwadis run by Rocket Learning, and Akanksha schools in Mumbai and Pune. For those who were able to access the programmes, we found that those participating in these programmes showed higher engagement levels associated with the alleviation of some of the barriers discussed above. What might have worked for E-paatshala was its design to use only materials available at home for educational activities. This minimised the need for parents to purchase any additional resources and ensured that it was relevant to the child's environment and experiences. We found that programmes that were supporting parents' financially – through provision of rations and devices for education – resulted in higher parental engagement in ECE.

The study also highlighted that a more decentralised approach of identifying and alleviating these barriers to ECE, through teachers and school systems as the forerunners, goes a long way. Being the first point of contact with both the child and the parents, teachers are

the most equipped to effectively engage with parents, address their challenges, and design adaptable and innovative modes of teaching and learning.

Empower households

We must leverage the present opportunity of heightened parental engagement in children's education. Efforts must be taken to empower households with time and resources so that they have the ability to prioritise ECE and are not forced to choose between their children's education. The provision of non-educational support to low-income households to alleviate income and food insecurities might be just as crucial in aiding parents to invest in education.

Second, we must collect information about teachers' experiences (on suitable modes of engagement with parents and children, delivery logistics, constraints of parents, etc.) and on innovations they have developed to increase parental engagement during school closures. We need to ask what has been done to alleviate constraints, and how can these be operationalised to reach more households?

While teachers should remain at the centre of this effort we must also make sure they are not further overburdened, by providing adequate resources and institutional support.

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Court on Pegasus

The Supreme Court of India has given us a balanced ruling in connection with the Pegasus allegations (Page 1, October 28). Though the Government's right to surveillance on matters of national security is not questionable, it is unauthorised surveillance for reasons other than national security that is definitely illegal and objectionable. A democratically elected government with its huge mandate must extend its full cooperation to the panel formed by the Bench for the probe. Since the panel is also vested with the responsibility to conduct the probe, it is imperative that the media exercise restraint, avoiding meaningless debates and being judgmental before completion of the probe.

S. SESHADRI,
Chennai

The Court's ruling heralds the return of a fair, free and fearless judiciary in India. In curbing the high-handedness of the nation's executive of the day, there is a clear message to the "powers that be" in the popular Shakespearean phrase – Caesar's wife must be above suspicion. The Court's stand will also puncture the balloon of unilateralism and authoritarianism and whimsical tendencies of my way or the highway.

P.K. SHARMA,
Barnala, Punjab

The Centre has found its fig-leaf of 'national security' torn asunder by the Supreme Court in its order of epochal dimensions. The proposed probe has all the potential to effect a churn in the nation's polity for the better. What the Centre could do best is to cooperate with the inquiry.

AYYASERI RAVEENDRANATH,
Aranmula, Kerala

The probe order itself has made a dent in the image of the Government for its hiding the facts. Alleged spying on citizens is a grave threat to privacy and an attack on core democratic principles. Though the setting up of the committee has been done with the good intention of bringing out the truth, its success will depend on the Government's cooperation.

D. SETHURAMAN,
Chennai

It appears that the last hope of Indian democracy lies only in the judiciary. The observations and actions of the Supreme Court in the Pegasus issue provide a comforting feeling that all is not lost in our system.

GEORGE MATHAI,
Kochi

The Indian judicial system seems to have proved its autonomy once again. The

Government should now keep aside its "skipping tactics" and cooperate with the committee. It has to ensure that the probe is conducted in a transparent manner.

BARLA SATHISHKUMAR,
Yadadri Bhuvanagiri, Telangana

While carefully setting out the terms of reference, the Court has done a balancing act of protecting one's right to privacy, by now a settled fundamental right, without, at the same time, disregarding genuine national security concerns. There are still doubts on whether the very government that remained stubborn in not cooperating with the Supreme Court despite its nudging, will stonewall the process on the pretext of national security, even inviting contempt. Given the manner in which the Centre has dealt with certain judgments of the top

court in the past, such apprehensions, of likely non-cooperation, are not entirely unfounded.

S.K. CHOUDHURY,
Bengaluru

World of ads

There is no doubt that some commercial advertisements are distasteful, often create aversion and invite derision. If advertisements are appealing and attractive, they may invoke esteem and regard for the manufacturers and producers concerned even if one does not want or need the products. For example, the advertisements brought out by Amul are not only witty and timely but also create a child-like liking for its products. It is no surprise that the mascot, the 'Amul girl' often steals the show. Needless to say, timing is the one of most important factors in almost everything, and advertising and

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marketing are no exceptions (Editorial, "A world minus ads", October 28). But there needs to be sensitivity.

C.G. KURIKOSSE,
Malappara, Kothamangalam, Kerala

Governor's actions

It is just over a month since the new Tamil Nadu Governor, R.N. Ravi, took charge. His seeking details on the functioning of government departments is unwarranted and an absolute interference in the State's administrative affairs (Tamil Nadu, October 27). The Governor being a retired Indian Police Service officer is sure to be aware of governmental systems. Tamil Nadu is also a full-fledged State and not a Union Territory. Acting as an extra-constitutional authority is undemocratic.

MANOHARAN MUTHUSWAMY,
Chennai